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STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE HENRY A. WAXMAN

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Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment that relates to the amount of oil we waste in our country.

There has been considerable misinformation spread about this amendment, so before I explain what the amendment does, I want to first describe what the amendment doesn't do.

In no way does this amendment undo or preclude the many measures in this bill designed to boost domestic oil production. I oppose many of these provisions, which include two separate federal grant programs for onshore and offshore production, as well as exemptions for oil and gas activities from the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act. When it comes to the floor, this bill will also contain oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, as well as numerous other provisions to encourage production on public lands. But this amendment doesn't relate to those provisions.

Moreover, nothing in this amendment mandates or provides new authority for any increase in vehicle fuel economy standards, even though I strongly support increasing those standards. Last year my amendment to significantly increase the CAFE standard was defeated, and it's obvious a majority in the House remains opposed to that sensible step. So I am not offering that amendment today.

Since there clearly isn't the political will in this Committee or the House to do what's necessary to establish a visionary energy policy for our country, I'm taking a different approach with today's amendment. This amendment doesn't represent what we should do – instead, it reflects the absolute minimum we must do. Its focus is on reducing the demand for foreign oil by targeting the ways we waste oil in our country.

The amendment directs the President to implement a plan to reduce U.S. demand for oil by 600,000 barrels per day. This is the average amount of oil we have imported every day from Iraq over the past five years. The President can rely on voluntary measures, regulations, or other means. The amendment does not provide any new authority or funding, but the President can come back to Congress to request that if he needs it. And the President need not meet the full target if he finds and certifies that there are no practical opportunities to further reduce the waste of oil.

I'd be the first to say we can and should do more than this. But since this Committee will not do more than this, we at least need to do this. I can't imagine eliminating waste is controversial for anyone except the oil industry, and the need for this action is compelling and obvious.

I'm not going to get us lost in statistics today, but there are three points that need mentioning.

First, the United States holds 3% of the world's oil reserves, but we consume 25% of annual worldwide oil production.

Second, over the past five years, we have imported on average 600,000 barrels of oil per day from Saddam Hussein and Iraq.

And third, that means we have sent over \$5 billion per year to Saddam Hussein and Iraq. At least part of this oil money was used to purchase the weapons that are now firing at our troops.

There is absolutely no reason that American dollars should finance Saddam Hussein and other repressive, anti-democratic regimes in the Mideast. The Mideast oil nations are the richest countries in the world with the poorest, most disenfranchised people. More than 70% of all exports and investments in the Arab world are tied to the oil industry, and many of the governments have no incentive to invest in education or their people. That, the experts tell us, is a driving force behind the unemployment, unrest, and resentment feeding Islamic extremism.

We all know that and yet this bill pretends otherwise. That's why today's legislative exercise is almost surreal. Not only are we at war with Iraq, but millions of Americans have concluded this is a war about oil. And we seem to be going out of our way in this debate to reinforce that suspicion. In this bill's 400 pages, there is nothing that focuses on the easiest and most common-sense step we can take – eliminating the waste of oil in this country.

Now, let me be clear about what I'm calling for. By eliminating the waste of 600,000 barrels of oil per day, we're only talking about a 2.5% reduction from projected demand. Let's think about how easy that would be to achieve.

For one thing, the President could make a speech to our country and make eliminating the waste of oil a national priority. A different ethic, reflected in millions of voluntary actions, could take hold and have dramatic effects. It could be as simple as shutting our cars when we run into Starbucks for a quick cup of coffee. It could be as simple as making sure our tires have the right air pressure. That may not seem like much, but it alone could save up to 200,000 barrels per day – one-third of the amendment's target.

Upgrading air traffic management systems could save another 50,000 barrels a day, while reducing flight delays. Weatherizing homes heated with oil could save around 80,000 barrels a day. And, of course, each one of us could think about whether we really need to make that extra trip to the store. These are just a few of the endless steps we can take to reduce waste.

Does eliminating waste matter? Yes. Is it impossible to do? No.

Two years ago, when Californians faced a devastating energy crisis, Governor Gray Davis called on them to reduce demand for electricity by 10%. This didn't involve Buck Rogers technology – the Governor simply called on California families and businesses to do a gut check on waste. They did it, and further blackouts were almost immediately prevented. It was the simplest of solutions. It didn't rely on new technologies or billions of dollars of subsidies. It just needed awareness, thought, and effort.

I have no doubt that if President Bush issued this challenge to all Americans – in the name of our troops – the national response would be overwhelming.

This amendment asks us to make the smallest of sacrifices at a time when over 200,000 American men and women stand ready in Iraq to give the ultimate sacrifice for their country. When this amendment was defeated during the subcommittee markup two weeks ago, no Americans had died in Iraq. Now we have lost at least 33 brave Americans. Can we really be willing to do so little when they are doing so much?

I know that every person in this room wants to do his or her part to keep faith with our brave troops. Our part, and our obligation, is to make sure that no American will ever be asked to risk their lives in a needless fight over foreign oil.

The only interest that would conceivably oppose this amendment is the oil industry. It obviously isn't in their interest to sell less oil, even if the oil is being wasted. But does the oil industry really have so much influence with this Committee, and in this House, that they can keep us from adopting even the most common-sense policies? Can they really keep us from acting in our national interest and trying to reduce our dependence on oil?

I hope, for the sake of our country, that the answer is no. I hope the House won't actually send a message to the world that we won't even try to eliminate the waste of oil. Defeating this amendment means that we're not really serious about crafting a sensible energy policy. I urge my colleagues to reverse the subcommittee vote defeating this amendment and to support it today.